

I. Introduction:

- A. Every once in a while I pick up one of the books of the 18th century preacher, George MacDonald.
1. Some of you might know him better for his works of fantasy or his Christian fiction, many of which have been edited by Michael Philips.
 2. But MacDonald considered himself, first of all, to be a preacher – a pastor of the Church of Scotland.
 3. His theology books are really quite difficult to read, because they are as deep and thoughtful as any you will ever find.
 4. They take a long time to finish, because sentence after sentence has to be read a second and third time.
 5. But the Lord lead me back to one of his books which has been sitting in my library for nearly 30 years.
 6. So several days before I started preparing this message, the Lord started preparing me.
- B. The first paragraph of the first chapter of MacDonald's book, *"Discovering the Character of God,"* I read,
1. *"What kind of God do you believe in?"*
 - a. *Everything depends on the KIND of God one believes in. This the starting point toward discovering who God truly is. How many ideas of God might there be?*
 - b. *Everyone who believes in him must have a different idea. Some of them must be nearer right than others.*
 - c. *Instead of automatically blaming the person who does NOT believe in a God, we should ask first, if his notion of God is a god that ought to be believed in."*
 2. Did you hear that last thought?
 3. *"Instead of automatically blaming the person who does not believe in a God, we should ask first, if his notion of God is a god that ought to be believed in."*
 4. Some people cannot believe in Jehovah or in the Lord Jesus Christ because what they have learned of the Lord, from professing Christians, was inaccurate.
 5. Maybe that atheist is quite correct in rejecting the god who has been presented to him, because that was only another false god bearing the name **"Jehovah."**
- C. Of course our only accurate source of information about the Lord must come from His own Word.
1. The curse caused by sin, has not only blinded our minds, but corrupted His creation which reflects Him.
 2. This is the reason there are thousands of false gods throughout the world.
 3. But there **IS** only one true and living God, and He has only one place where He has written down any revelation of Himself.
 4. But even in the pages of the Bible, sometimes the testimony about God comes from people who only think they know Him.
 5. Their report is divinely inspired and accurate as far as that goes, but what they say is sometimes skewed.
 6. So even in reading the Bible we need the leadership of the Spirit.
- D. Nehemiah prays to the Lord with a depth of theology that puts most people to shame.
1. I have books on the doctrine of theology by Pink, Charnock, Lloyd-Jones, MacDonald and others, but the theology of Solomon, David, Daniel, Paul and Moses remind us that they are all just students.
 2. Nehemiah's prayer may not be the beginning or the end of a study of God, but it should certainly be in the mix.
 3. **Nehemiah gives us** God's highly descriptive **name**; he describes the Lord's **character**, and he then points out some of the **things which divinity does**.

II. Who was Nehemiah's God?

- A. He was, and still is, the LORD God of heaven – *"Yahweh Elohim Sha-may-im."*
1. Nehemiah first addressed the Lord as *"Yahweh"* or *"Jehovah."*
 2. If the Lord has a name, this is it, and like so many names in the Bible it has meaning; it is significant.

- B. When **Moses** was first learning about the Lord, and he was being commissioned to bring Israel out of Egypt, *“Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?”* – **Exodus 3:13.**
1. *“And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.”*
 2. The words **“I am that I am”** are a derivative of **“Yahweh, Yahweh.”**
 3. **“Jehovah”** means **“I AM,”** and when it is the eternal God who says **“I am,”** He means, **“I always am.”**
 4. **“Yahweh”** or **“Jehovah”** is a reference to the eternal nature of God.
- C. In the Lord’s next sentence to Moses, He reiterated, *“Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.”*
1. Added to the idea of God’s eternal and unchangeable nature is another feature often tied to this name.
 2. Jehovah is the **covenant keeping God** – the God who **keeps His word.**
 3. When Nehemiah calls His God **“LORD”** or **“Jehovah”** he is pointing to the God of Abraham, Isaac & Israel.
 4. Jehovah is the God of salvation, and that takes us back to love and grace which are at the very heart of salvation.
 5. When Nehemiah uses this most holy and meaningful name – the unspeakable name according to the Jews – he is accidentally or perhaps intentionally speaking of the bond between his nation and the Lord.
 6. The only people who knew the Creator by this name were the people of God – not the heathen – not the Egyptians or the Persians.
- D. But as is so often the case, Nehemiah ties Jehovah, the God of love, to the God of infinite power – **“Elohim.”**
1. This was the God who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth.
 2. **“Elohim”** is the God who needs no one’s approval to destroy Sodom or to send plagues upon Egypt.
 3. This is the God who in the Old Testament is the supreme judge of all things.
 4. He is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent – oh, yes, and He is sovereign.
 5. Elohim is the very epitome of all that we might think God is or can be.
- E. The reality is, the **God of Nehemiah** is both Jehovah and Elohim.
1. Furthermore, the **New Testament God** of the Apostles is both as well.
 2. In fact, we know him in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 3. **Isaiah 9:6** is one of the great Old Testament prophecies about the Lord Jesus – our Saviour, our Jehovah.
 4. Isaiah, in prophecy, says, *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given (speaking about the incarnation of the Son of God): and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”*
 5. In speaking of **Christ**, the words **“the mighty God”** are **“gibowr Elohim.”**
 6. Christ Jesus is both Jehovah and Elohim.
 7. Nehemiah was addressing the God whom we know to be **“the Lord Jesus Christ.”**
- F. By the way, I am getting ahead of myself, but take a look at **verse 11** before we move on.
1. Please notice that as Nehemiah continues to pray, he speaks to God using a different word for **“Lord.”**
 2. This **“adonai,”** and as far as I know, it is never written in full capital letters in our Bibles.
 3. It means **“Lord”** in the sense of **“boss”** or **“master”** – maybe just **“Sir.”**
 4. To Nehemiah **“Jehovah”** was **not a mere name** or **title**; Jehovah was **not JUST God.**
 5. No, He really was God in the sense that He was his master – just as it should always be with Jehovah.
- G. The third thing Nehemiah mentions in addressing God is that Jehovah Elohim is **“the God of Heaven.”**
1. *“And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven, And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven...”*

2. As I began to study this passage, I wondered whether or not this might have special significance in that land where astrology began.
3. Ancient peoples, without the interference of artificial light, got to know the planets and stars quite well.
4. And many of them incorporated the heavens into their idolatry.

H. Seventeen times in the Old Testament we read of the *"God of Heaven,"* and **only twice** is that reference found outside of *Ezra, Nehemiah* and *Daniel* – all books related to the exile.

1. But in *Genesis*, Abraham made his servant *"swear by (Jehovah) the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that (he would) not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites."*
2. The second reference is from *Jonah* who said to the sailors before they fed him to the fishes – *"I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land."*
3. *"The God of Heaven"* is mentioned only twice in the New Testament, interestingly both are in *Revelation*.
4. Despite the context of the exile, it appears to me that this is simply a reference to the God who rules over Heaven and earth – Jehovah – Elohim.

III. After identifying the LORD, Nehemiah describes Him just a bit.

A. *"O LORD God heaven, the GREAT and terrible God..."*

1. When **you** use the word *"great"* what do you mean?
2. Isn't it true that the context determines the meaning or the extent of the *"greatness"*?
3. Didn't we touch on this a couple weeks ago when I mentioned *"Alexander the great?"*
 - a. Who was the greater man *"Alexander"* or *"George Washington"*?
 - b. Who was the greater man *"King David"* or *"King Solomon"*? Were they greater than **Josiah**?
 - c. Was really a *"great"* play which won the football game in over time, or that basketball game?
4. We tell the two-year-old that he did a *"great job,"* but if the teenager did the same thing we might criticize him.

B. Isn't true greatness determined, at least somewhat determined, by the circumstances, and by the person?

1. There is no great man – no great man of God – whose greatness should be mentioned in the same sentence as that of the great God Himself. That is why I called Nehemiah *"a good man"* this morning.
2. In *Daniel 2* – one of the books of the exile – God's prophet was speaking to king Nebuchadnezzar about a rather negative revelation.
3. He said, *"forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the GREAT God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure."*
4. Daniel said, It is **the great God** who *"changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding."*
5. When it comes to gods only the greatest is omnipotent – only Jehovah Elohim is truly great.
6. Oh and by the way, Jehovah's saints are, *"looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ"* – **Titus 2:13.**

C. Jehovah is the *"great God"* in a **positive sense**, but He is equally as great in a **negative sense** – he is *the "terrible God."*

1. The word *"terrible"* refers to *"fearful."*
2. Our God, the God who loved and saved us, the God of eternal covenants and eternal grace, is **worthy** of our eternal fear.
3. **I didn't say** that we, as saints, should be **terrified**, but that he is **worthy of our fear**.
4. If we aren't struck with awe from time to time as we meditate upon our God, then our perspective is skewed.
5. No wonder some of the lost cannot believe in Him, because we don't know Him as we should.
6. Nehemiah's God was the Lord God of Heaven, the terrible God.
7. And like it or not Christian, this same God is yours in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

D. Nehemiah then described his God as **the Covenant-keeper**.

1. *"I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments."*
2. I was trying to picture in my mind where we would be if it were not for God's covenants.
3. There are **covenants** which God has made **unilaterally** with mankind.
4. For example, *"And the (rainbow) shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth."*
5. There are covenants which He has made with us through Abraham and others.
6. And there are covenants between the members of the God-head with which He has blessed us .
7. The Second Person vowed to sacrifice Himself for the saving of a few wretched sinners, and the Father vowed to accept His sacrifice on their behalf, and the Spirit agreed to apply the Lord's saving grace.

E. But Nehemiah knew nothing specifically of that – theologically – so he just referred to some of the divine/human covenants.

1. In **verse 8** he says, *"Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations."*
2. God promised Israel that if they rebelled against Him, they would pay a specific price.
3. But then God added, and Nehemiah reiterated, *"But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there."*
4. There had been many Jews in exile, like Daniel, whose hearts were broken over Israel's sin and God's judgment.
5. And God remembered the covenant which He had established, and Judah was sent back from Babylon.
6. But within a generation or two, those sinners once again forgot the context of the covenant and were so filled with self and sin that God was obligated to withdraw His blessings once again.
7. This was the cause of Nehemiah's broken heart.
8. But he reached out to the Lord saying, *"These are thy servants and thy people, whom thou has redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong arm."*

F. Incidentally, coupled to **God's covenants**, Nehemiah referred to His **great mercy**.

1. *"And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments."*
2. Again I ask, where would Israel be – where would we be – without God's covenants?
3. But don't think for a moment that there is some sort of intergalactic court which forces the sovereign God to keep His covenants with us.
4. There is something higher than that – there is the heart of the Lord Himself.
 - a. *"It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not."*
5. Later in **Nehemiah 9** we hear the prayer, *"Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God."*
6. No sinner can plead with God based on personal righteousness, or covenants, or works, or anything else.
7. At the very root of every request there must be a recognition that we deserve nothing.
8. Mercy, Lord, mercy is our great need.

IV. At some point, Nehemiah's thoughts transitioned from describing God to beseeching Him.

- A. Based on the covenants, based upon mercy, based upon the nature of Jehovah, Nehemiah began to plead.
 1. Of course, the sovereign and holy God does is not obligated to listen to us.
 2. So Nehemiah prayed *"Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants."*
 3. Do you honestly think that God is sitting by the phone like some little old lonely grandmother anxiously waiting for you to give Him a call?

4. Such is not the case.
5. It must be with humility that we approach the King; it is as we beg for mercy that He hears us.
6. ***But He IS attentive*** when we approach correctly.

B. As I tried to suggest his morning, Nehemiah acknowledges that the Lord has standards

1. *“Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father’s house have sinned.*
2. *We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.”*
3. If it was not for divine invitations, honest Christians should have a hard time coming to the throne of grace.
4. Because not only is that throne high and lifted up, so spectacularly glorious that our eyes can’t look upon it, but it is holy, and the One upon it is infinitely holy.
5. And yet the gracious and merciful invitations to come before him are unmistakable, and so we come.

C. I know that it sounds silly, but Nehemiah pleads for the Lord to remember.

1. He who cannot forget anything, except as he deliberately chooses to forget our sins buried there under the blood of Christ....
2. He who cannot forget anything is not angry when we ask him to remember His promises.
3. *“Remember, I beseech thee, the word....”*
4. If for no other reason, we need to read, learn and memorize those promises which God has given to us – in order that we may use them in our prayers.
5. God is honored when we do; God is pleased when we do.

D. And for what does Nehemiah pray? Restoration.

1. This is the culmination, humanly speaking, of Nehemiah request. Restoration.
2. And among other things, God is in the restoration business.
3. *“But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.”*
4. Last week I said that a study of Nehemiah would be appropriate because we are in need of restoration.
5. Isn’t it true? Not just nationally or economically, but spiritually even more.
6. But are we willing to pay the price to be restored?
7. Nehemiah is willing. We see it in his mournful tears.
8. And we hear it in this prayer.
9. I close once again with *“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”*